DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 036 IR 019 864

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TITLE	Violence and the Media: Teaching Strategies and a Rationale.
PUB DATE	1999-04-21
NOTE	14p.; Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999)
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Activities; *Mass Media; *Mass Media Effects; Mass Media Role; Production Techniques; *Teaching Methods; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Media Education; Theatrical Makeup

ABSTRACT

This paper suggests teaching strategies for grades 4 through 12 that examine the commercial media and their messages as agenda setters, i.e., as mechanisms for selecting social issues, establishing their importance, and defining socially acceptable attitudes and responses to those issues. The strategies also explore how the media can create biased points of view and how commercial interests help to determine the form and content of most commercial media messages. They are designed to raise awareness, to explore the extent to which media messages advocate values that are antithetical to ethical standards advocated by schools and responsible parents, and to place in context the need for media education at all levels of learning. The objective of the first activity presented is for participants to examine the extent to which violent media messages pervade our modern society. In the second activity, the objective is for participants to demystify how violent media messages are manufactured for high action/high violence television and film narratives; stunts and make-up workshops provide participants with experience in creating the illusion of violence and preparing actors for screen roles that require altering their appearance. Recipes for false flesh and blood, a narrator's script, and an equipment diagram are included. (Contains 14 references.) (MES)

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Violence and the Media: Teaching Strategies and a Rationale

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Violence and the Media: Teaching Strategies and a Rationale

AERA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
21 April 1999, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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Violence and the Media: A Rationale

The media and their messages are powerful purveyors of values. Often the values advocated by messages in the commercial media, and particularly those delivered via television, are antithetical to the values advocated by schools and responsible parents. Violence, sexist behaviors, and unilateral decision-making are some of the modal values that commercial media messages glorify and romanticize. They often portray these values in desirable ways, which encourage emulation and model them as successful strategies for social living. On the other hand, caring, sharing, honesty and non-violent problem-solving are rarely shown in the same light. And yet, these are the modal values we aim to perpetuate through our socializing institutions (schools, family, religious affiliations). Consider that children, on average, spend twice as much time with the commercial media than they do with any other single socializing institution (school, family, religious affiliation). The crucial question is, how can schools and responsible parents address this dichotomy in modal values?

Exposure to violent media messages tends to have different effects upon different people. However, metaresearch indicates that there is a causal relationship between exposure to media violence and aggression (Wood, Wong, & Chachere, 1991). As well, research indicates that the more an individual is exposed to violent media messages the more likely s/he is to believe that the world is a violent place (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). And over-exposure to violent media messages can desensitize individuals to "real" pain and suffering in their own living environment through "habituation" (Ornstein & Ehrlich, 1990; Gathercoal, 1990). As individuals we may not realize these effects because our present state of health is seen as "normal." It is only when we quantify the results of a study that we can truly visualize these effects (Ornstein & Ehrlich, 1990). For example, if participants in a study were found to be 25% more prone to violent acts after watching violent cartoons, the "normal" individual would not notice such an effect, because the individual may only lose his or her temper four times in a two month period. A 25% increase, then, would mean that the individual might lose their temper five times in a two month period. The individual probably wouldn't notice such a small change over that period of time. It prob-

ably would not seem significant. The result is, however, that the individual now perceives losing his/her temper five times in two months as "normal." In effect, we, as a modern society, probably do not realize how prone to violent action we have become. For many in our modern society fear and violence may tacitly be "a way of life."

Violent media messages exist for a wide range of reasons, most of which are linked to ideology and economics. For the sake of brevity this paper will deal only with commercial media messages. The suggested teaching strategies will examine the media and their messages as agenda setters. That is, as a mechanism for selecting social issues, establishing their importance, and defining socially acceptable attitudes and responses to those issues. They will also explore how the media can create biased points of view and how commercial interests help to determine the form and content of most commercial media messages.

It will become apparent that:

- violence portrayed in the media is different from "real life" violence,
- violent commercial media messages are manufactured by a large and powerful industry whose main purpose is to make money, and
- violent media messages often employ sophisticated visual and aural techniques that dramatize and romanticize violent behavior.

These teaching strategies are designed to raise awareness. They will explore the extent to which media messages advocate values that are antithetical to ethical standards advocated by schools and responsible parents. They will also place in context the need for media education at all levels of learning.

Violence and the Media - Teaching Strategies

Grade Level: Most appropriate for students in grades 4 - 12.

The Pervasiveness of Violence in Commercial Media

Objective: Participants will examine the extent to which violent media messages pervade our modern society.

Rationale: Violence in the media pervades our modern society. We have grown so used to portrayals of violence in the media that we rarely think about it. As Ornstein and Ehrlich (1990) put it, we have become "habituated." We do not notice how much violence is portrayed via media messages, and we probably do not realize the effect that violent media messages are having on us and our modern society.

This activity is designed to highlight the extent to which violence and violent topics pervade our news and entertainment media.

Before you begin the lesson, introduce yourself and give a little information about your background. Establish some behavioral expectations with the students and write them on the chart paper. Provide students with a schema for the lesson, e.g.,

a) Given that we are going to investigate why violence is in the media and how it is manufactured, what do you expect from me as the leader of the workshop? Ensure all agree!

b) Given that we are going to investigate why violence is in the media and how it is manufactured, what do you expect from yourselves as workshop participants? Ensure that the expectations generated by the students are appropriate and that all agree to the expectations!

c) List expectations in positive terms - two lists one for the leader and one for the participants. If students have difficulty with any of the expectations, respectfully remind them of the agree-

ment. Procedure

Warm-up - When all participants are seated and ready, ask them to think about how much television they personally watch in a week. Ask them to think about the nights during the week; do they watch the news, prime time television or even a video? Think about the daytime; do they watch soaps, news or talk shows? Think about the weekend; do they watch sports, televised movies or weekend news? Ask them to come to a number in their mind as to how many hours of video and television, on average, they personally watch in one week. When all have a number in mind, ask them to stand up and make a number line across the room.

Indicate one wall as zero hours per week and the opposite wall as 90 hours per week. Invite the participants to talk with each other as they form their number line. They can find out how many hours per week other people watch. Their number line need not be evenly dispersed along the 0-90 continuum, but all participants should be in the right order from zero to the maximum number of hours.

When all are in their proper order, call for attention and find out what the minimum number of hours per week is, who that person is (optional as some may be embarrassed) and what is her/his favorite program. Then interview the person who watches the most television; find out the number of hours, who the person is (optional) and what is her/his favorite program. Finally, estimate the middle of the number line and call that average. Indicate a person standing approximately in the middle and interview them; find out how many hours per week, who the person is (optional) and what is her/his favorite television show?

Position yourself in the number line at 25 hours per week. Indicate to the participants that this is about the average number of hours per week that children spend watching television. That number does not include videotape movies or computer games. Indicate that studies have documented children's viewing at as many as 90 hours per week. Point out that children's favorite programs are not news and current affairs programs; their favorite programs are cartoons, and prime time television programs, and that only about 7% of their viewing is of television programs made especially for children (Gerbner, 1987). Emphasize that not only are children watching, on average, more television than adults, but the programs they choose to watch are substantially different than those selected by older students and adults. Allow students to reflect upon this for a moment, and then invite them to sit down and discuss their ideas about how much video and television they watch.

Now, pose the question, "What is the most violent act you have seen on television or in the movies?" Invite participants to discuss the question. Allow a few minutes and then have three or four students report. Write the name of the program or film on the board. Then ask for the rating of the program or video. Usually they will have an "R" rated. Inquire how many participants have seen an "R" rated video. Ask what the rating means to them. Then, ask the question, "What effect did seeing that act of violence have on you?" Invite participants to discuss in small groups for a moment. Then ask students to share with the whole group and write the effects on the board. You will probably get comments like, "No Effect", "Thought it was funny," Maybe you will get the response, "Wanted to act it out" and "Disgusted," "sick."

a) Explain that if they felt no effect or they thought it was funny, that they should entertain the possibility that they are desensitized to violence. Explain that this is one of the effects of viewing violence on television, in the movies, and computer games.
b) Explain that if they felt like they wanted to "act it out," that they may be experiencing a result of the modeling theory. Explain that this is another effect that violence in the media has on us. When we view violent films, television, and play violent computer games, we are more likely

to act in a violent way in real life.

c) Explain that if they felt scared or fearful, that they may be experiencing the effect of the "mean-world syndrome." This effects older adults, mainly, and correlates with the number of hours of violent television they watch. The more violent television programs the person watches, the more they believe the world is a mean place to live.

d) Explain that being disgusted and feeling sick are "normal" reactions to violence portrayed in the media.

Now, ask this question, "How much violence is on television and in the movies?" Ask students to predict and discuss it in small groups. After a moment, ask for group predictions. Explain to students that according to George Gerbner, the number of acts of violence portrayed on commercial television has been relatively steady over the last thirty years. There are 6 to 8 acts of violence per hour during prime time television programs, 2 entertaining murders every evening, and 20 to 30 acts of violence during cartoons.

Ask this last question, "Why is violence portrayed in the media?" Have students predict. They will probably say, because people like it. Inform students that the most popular programs on television are not violent. Situation comedy programs tend to be some of the most popular programs. Leave this open-ended as you move into the stunt and make-up workshop.

Manufacturing Violence in the Media

Objective: Participants will demystify how violent media messages are manufactured for high action/ high violence television and film narratives.

Rationale: High action/high violence media messages employ sophisticated techniques to make their audiences believe that violent acts have occurred. Because the camera has "only one eye," it can be easily fooled into believing things happened that actually did not. The audience may actually believe that the hero hits the villain, and yet, the hero may have strategically missed the villain by three feet. By employing sound effects and make-up, the hero can be made to look like s/he is unbeatable. It all depends upon the script.

Most dramatized media messages use actors that have been "made-up" to portray characters in a script. Make-up is necessary for almost all productions, not just those that portray werewolves, aliens and "splatter movies" that involve flesh wounds and mutilations. Even the evening news-readers wear make-up. Often we do not think that people who look "normal" are wearing make-up, but they need to wear make-up simply to look "normal" when recorded on film or television.

Normal skin pigments vary in hues of red, blue, yellow and brown. All of these pigments are recorded in different tones when viewed on television or film. Make-up helps to neutralize the more zealous pigments that may be recorded. Usually screen tests are conducted on various actors, prior to production, to determine what make-up is needed to enhance their appearance.

The lighting systems used in film and television productions actually "absorb" the natural color of the skin. When recorded on film or videotape, the appearance of performers is changed considerably. The face will appear "flat" and the features will become blurred and lack definition. The use of make-up counteracts this effect; it covers facial blemishes, freckles and pimples and gives facial contours the effect called for by the script. It gives the actor more "confidence" to perform as required. Make-up also conceals red noses and cheeks, bluish beard lines, shaving cuts, etc., which are particularly noticeable in close-ups where all the blemishes are magnified. The make-up artist usually applies "paint and

powder" to give the actor more facial versatility and give mobility to the expressive features of the character that the actor is portraying.

The most obvious use of make-up is when a particular production employs it to make things look different than they actually are in real life, for example, when an actor needs a "flesh wound," a "burn" or even a false nose.

This activity is designed to provide the participants with experience in creating the illusion of violence and preparing an actor for a screen role that requires altering their appearance in order to comply with the demands of a script.

Materials Needed:

For the Stunts Workshop - Overhead Projector, Screen, Prepared Overhead Transparency (Master Attached), Camcorder with Video Out Capabilities (see attached Schema for Connection to Monitor), Blank Videotape, Tripod, RF Cord, Monitor, Narrator's Script (Master Attached), Masking Tape.

For the Make-up Workshop - "False Flesh" (see recipe following), Pallet Knives or Dull Table Knives, Face Paints or Acrylic Paints (red, black, yellow and blue), Paint Brushes, Paint Pallets, Small Pieces of Sponge, Tissues, Paper Towels, Cold Cream Make-up Remover, Bowls of Water, Ingredients for making "Blood" (corn syrup or honey, corn starch, red and blue coloring), Small, Clear, Plastic Cup. Procedure

Before the students arrive, ensure that the camcorder is firmly set on a tripod and connected to a television monitor so that the picture recorded on the camcorder can be seen on the monitor (see attached Schema for Connection to Monitor, following). Also, clear a large space in the room where the "talent" can perform. Ensure that the blank videotape is rewound and in the camcorder. Also, have the False Flesh ready for the make-up part of the workshop.

Warm-up - As the students arrive, invite them to sit in small groups and discuss the questions "What instances of violence have you witnessed lately in the media?" and "Speculate about the various reasons as to why the violence was portrayed in the way you viewed it and/or listened to it." When all participants are ready, invite groups to report upon their discussions.

Stunts

Explain to the participants that during this session we are going to investigate how violence is "manufactured" for high action/high violence television and film narratives. Violence is manufactured when media message makers use the technology to fool their audience into believing a violent act has just occurred. They do this through special effects, editing, stunts, and make-up. This session will demonstrate some of the techniques that can be used to manufacture violence through simple stunts and make-up.

Ask for volunteers from the participants: someone to operate the camera, someone to do the sound effects, someone to narrate and two people to be the "talent." Have the talent stand in the large open space in the room and have the camera operator compose a shot of them in "long shot, " i.e., so we can see both subjects from the top of their heads to the bottom of their feet. Position the television monitor so that all participants, including the talent, can see. Decide which person will be the aggressor and which person will be the victim. Instruct the sound effects person and the narrator to stand next to the camera. Give the narrator the "Narrator's Script" (following). Explain that you will act as the stunt coordinator and director.

When all is ready, perform this "One Shot" script. This means that the camera operator will turn

the camera on in the beginning and turn it off at the end of the script. The script treatment goes like this:

Somewhere loose in the city is the "Mad Slapper," a person who jumps from nowhere and slaps people silly. Right now the Mad Slapper is lurking in a dark ally waiting for the next victim. But who should walk down the ally? It's Superwoman/man disguised as (volunteers name). The Mad Slapper leaps from hiding and slaps Superwoman/man three times. Superwoman/man is not affected by these physical insults and literally "blows" the Mad Slapper away with her/his breath.

Rehearse the script with the talent first. Have the aggressor lurk to the side of the shot, just off screen. Then have the victim wander into shot. Demonstrate to the aggressor how they are to "jump from hiding," and slap the victim. Explain to the aggressor that at no time are they to make contact with the victim. In fact, the aggressor is not to be any closer than five feet. This is for reasons of health and safety, and we do not want our talent getting hurt!

Explain the reason we can do this from such a distance is because the camera only has "one eye." As a result, the camera has no depth perception. Hence, the camera cannot tell how far something is in front of something else. Essentially, the camera takes a three dimensional world and converts it into a two dimensional picture. When we view television, we view a sequence of two dimensional pictures, called shots, and we mentally draw three dimensional relationships in our mind. This is how we can fool our audience into believing that we have hit someone. Explain that this illusion works best when the victim or the aggressor is facing the camera. When viewed "side-on" by the camera the effect is spoiled, because the audience can see the space between the two talent. So, demonstrate how the aggressor is to "jump from hiding" and assault the victim.

Jump in front of the camera with your back to the camera and the victim facing the camera. Ensure that you are five feet away from the victim. You can even put masking tape on the floor to mark the spot where the victim and the aggressor will stand. Then hold your arm out wide to the side with your hand open and swing it around, across at face level of the victim, but missing them by two to three feet. Bring the hand back in the same pattern and then around a third time. Even though you miss the victim by at last two to three feet, when you swing your hand in an appropriate arch, the picture on the television monitor looks like you made contact. Instruct the sound effects person to clap their hands together just as your hand passes the victim's face. This sound effect enhances the illusion. To complete the illusion, instruct the victim to move her/his head a little in the direction of the slap. Always rehearse the stunt coordination in "slow motion," first, then work up to speed. Explain that stunt work is more like dancing than wrestling. All stunt people need to work together, or someone could get hurt. This is dangerous work, and it takes good timing and communication to make it work well.

After you have modeled the slaps, demonstrate how the aggressor becomes the victim by having Superwoman/man blow air out of her/his mouth as you raise your hands and walk backwards as if being blown off the screen. Explain that industry stunt people would probably have a harness attached to a large "rubber band" and fastened around the Mad Slapper's waist. Then when Superwoman/man blows, the victim would lift his/her feet from the ground and the "rubber band" would pull her/him backwards where s/he would land on a soft mat. Explain that since we are not stunt people, and we do not have the proper safety equipment, we will simply walk backwards and throw our hands in the air. Demonstrate this technique for the Mad Slapper.

When you have finished your modeling of procedures with the talent, tell them that we are now ready for a rehearsal. Announce, "This is a slow motion rehearsal." "Is the camera ready?" Wait for the camera to respond, "Ready." "Is the Sound Effect ready?" "Is the Narrator ready?" "Is the talent ready?" When all are ready, count, "6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1," and then give a signal for the Narrator to begin reading. The narrator reads, "Somewhere loose in the city is the Mad Slapper. A person who jumps from nowhere and slaps people silly. Right now the Mad Slapper is lurking in a dark ally waiting for the next victim. But who should walk down the ally? It's Superwoman/man disguised as (volunteers

name)." Then cue talent and have them walk through the stunts in slow motion. Have the sound effects person clap her/his hands at the appropriate times and blow into the microphone when Superwoman/man blows the Mad Slapper off the screen. If the rehearsal goes well, put it down on videotape by repeating the same procedure, but say, "Camera rolling," before you count down and cue the narrator. Instruct the talent to move at a safe speed.

After recording the "One Shot" script, rewind and view it on the television by pushing the play button on the camcorder.

Invite participants to discuss violent incidents they have seen on film and television that might have used these and similar techniques for manufacturing violence.

Make-up

Explain to the students that stunts are a part of the manufacturing of violence in film and television narratives. Another aspect is make-up, which is applied after the stunt work. Let's say for example, that the Mad Slapper hurt her/his hand after hitting Superwoman/man. Make-up can be used to visually display the injury. This injury could then be shown in the shot after the slapping stunt. In this way, we can graphically convey the extent of the injury to the audience.

Set out the materials listed in the Materials Needed section for the Make-up Workshop. Explain that most, if not all, of these items have come from the kitchen.

Begin by discussing the role and function of make-up in film and television production. Tell the participants that most of the time actors and personalities appearing on film and television wear make-up. Even when it appears that they are not wearing make-up, they usually are wearing pancake make-up that covers any facial blemishes that they might have. Explain that you are going to create the illusion that the Mad Slapper cut her/his hand. Tell the participants that this type of make-up is the most noticeable use of make-up in television and film production and it needs to be applied artistically if it is to be believable. Hence, you will demonstrate the techniques for applying the make-up, and then they can try their hand (no pun intended) at creating a similar illusion.

First, show the participants the things that you will be using to demonstrate the make-up techniques. Show them the "False Flesh." Note that the "False Flesh" is white, because the main ingredients for making the "False Flesh" are flour and salt. Explain that even though it is a light color it can be used with people of color, because it is usually painted and pigmented after it is applied to the skin. Now show the participants your small bowl of water, tissues, paper towels, cold cream, small piece of sponge, paint brushes, pallet knife or dull table knife, face paints and/or acrylic paint, and the ingredients for making "blood." Explain to the participants that the script calls for the Mad Slapper to have a flesh wound on the hand and that it is supposed to be bleeding. As a result, you will need to mix up some blood.

To make blood, pour two tablespoons of corn syrup or honey into the clear, plastic cup. Then thicken the corn syrup or honey with corn starch, about one and a half tablespoons. Mix it together with a pallet knife or dull table knife. Then mix in one teaspoon of red food coloring. The mixture should be brilliant red. Finally, add one drop of blue food coloring and mix until it is one color and consistency.

When the blood is all ready, ask the volunteer who played the Mad Slapper to sit in front of the other participants as you demonstrate the techniques involved in creating a cut on the hand.

Start by applying "False Flesh" to the Mad Slapper's hand. Emphasize to the participants that it is important not to use too much "False Flesh," or it can ruin the effect. Apply the "False Flesh" to the actor by first wetting the part of the actor's hand where the wound is to be applied with water from the bowl. Then place a thumb nail size ball of "False Flesh" on the actor's hand. Again, wet your fingers and smooth out the "False Flesh" molding it to the actor's hand. The "False Flesh" can be wetted and smoothed out with the fingers so that it appears "as one" with the actors own skin. Since the "False Flesh" is a flour based substance it will dry out and crack if left on for long periods of time. Explain to the participants that this technique is designed to last only a couple of hours, until filming or videotaping of the scene is complete. The "False Flesh" will last longer if pancake make-up or face paint is applied over the top.

When the "False Flesh" has been smoothed in so that it looks like part of the actor's hand, that will be the Mad Slapper's flesh wound. Apply paint over the "False Flesh" and surrounding skin to blend it in with the natural skin color. When the actor's hand is all colored, use a pallet knife or dull table knife to create an illusion of a flesh wound on the actor's hand. This is done by first wetting knife with water from the bowl. This allows the knife to slide through the "False Flesh" without sticking to it. Then gently cut through the "False Flesh" smoothed on to the actor's hand. This creates the illusion that the Mad Slapper's hand has been cut. Use the knife to spread the edges of the cut apart so it appears to be a gaping wound.

Now use a paint brush and black paint to paint the inside of the wound. Painting the inside of the wound black will add depth to the wound.

Now the wound is ready for blood. Use a paint brush to apply the blood to the cut in the Mad Slapper's hand. Allow the blood to drip out of the wound, but be careful not to get it on the actor's clothes. Use paper towels to protect the actor. Note that everything in the blood recipe is edible, but it will stain clothes.

Your wounded actor is now ready for filming or videotaping. Explain to the participants that this make-up can look very real, so none of the make-up is to be worn outside the workshop area. However, they can record their artistic efforts by recording them on videotape. Demonstrate this by videotaping your "wounded" Mad Slapper. Make sure the videotape is at the end of the first recording. Have the Mad Slapper hold her/his hand up near her/his face, look at the wound and give an anguished cry.

Now, have the participants work in pairs, one is the make-up

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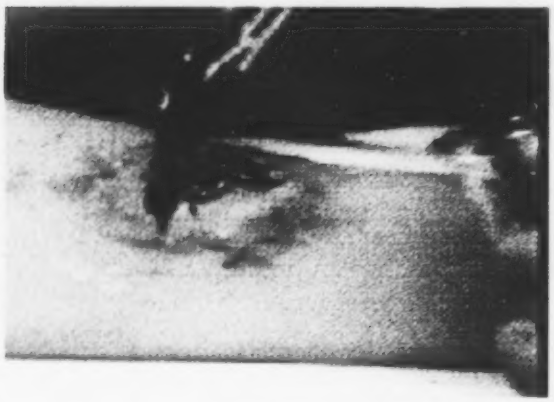
artist and the other is the actor. They are to create their own wounded actors. Instruct them to follow the same procedures that you used in your demonstration. After they finish, help them to record their work on videotape. Then swap and have the other person apply make-up to their partner.



Closure

Ask participants to think of instances in films and television shows where these stunts and make-up techniques might have been used. Invite them to comment about the process and the techniques employed.

RECIPES

FALSE FLESH RECIPE

One Half Cup Salt One Cup Flour One Cup Water One Tablespoon Cooking Oil One Teaspoon Cream of Tartar

Mix all ingredients together, then cook slowly over very low heat. Stir continuously until it forms a ball (approximately 15 minutes). The flesh should not be tacky to touch and should be stored in an airtight container or plastic bag when cool.

BLOOD RECIPE

Corn Syrup or Honey Food Coloring Corn Flour
Pour about two tablespoons of corn syrup or honey in a clear, plastic cup. Thicken the corn syrup or honey by adding approximately one and a half tablespoons of corn starch. Mix the two together and add more corn syrup or corn starch to thicken or dilute as needed. The blood should not be too drippy or it becomes very messy. Finally, color the blood with food coloring. For human blood add thirty to forty drops (about a teaspoon) of red and one drop of blue food coloring and mix it up.

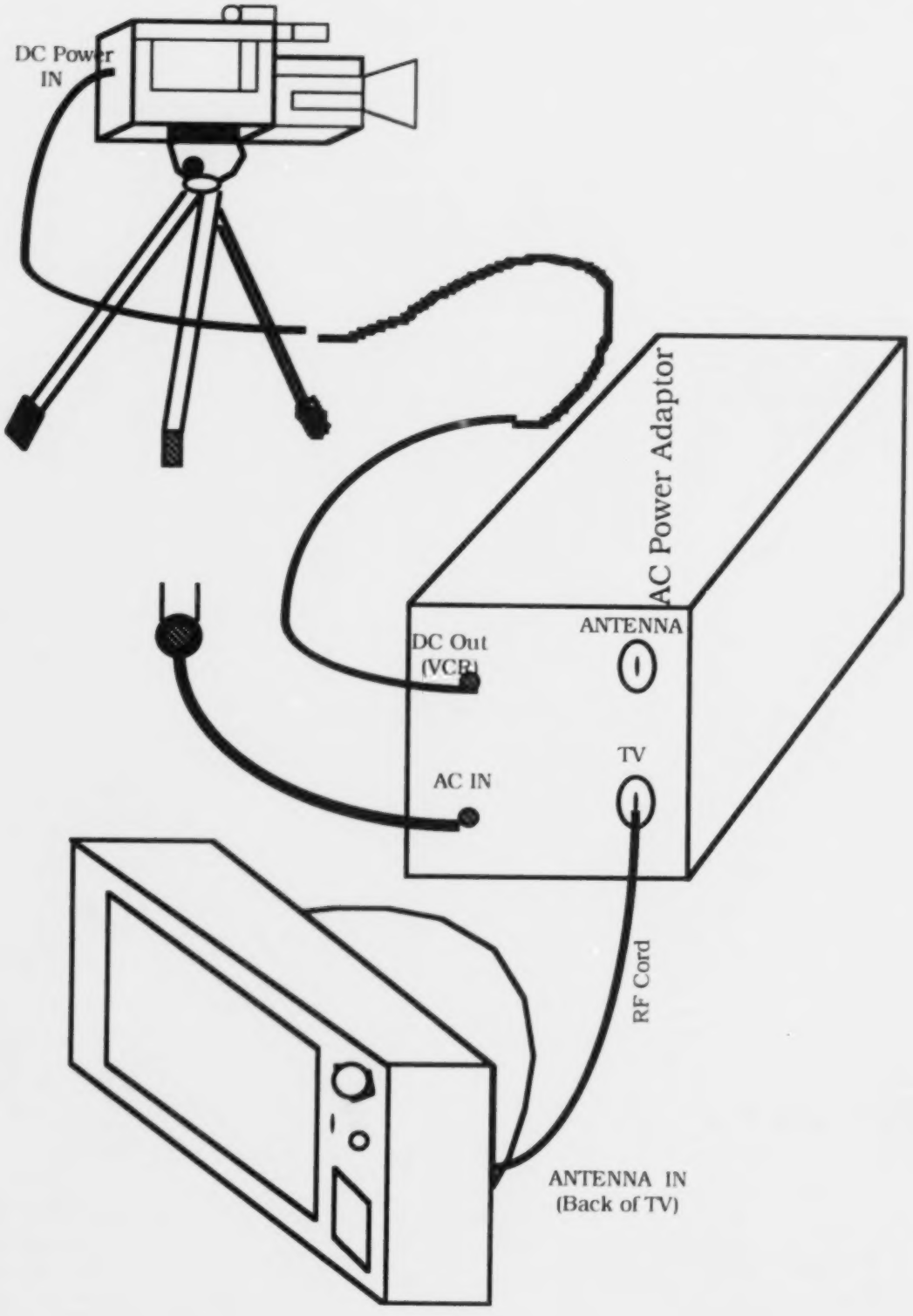
NARRATOR'S SCRIPT

SOMEWHERE, LOOSE IN THE CITY, IS THE "MAD SLAPPER;" A PERSON WHO JUMPS FROM NOWHERE AND SLAPS PEOPLE SILLY.

RIGHT NOW, THE MAD SLAPPER IS LURKING IN A DARK ALLY WAITING FOR THE NEXT VICTIM.

BUT WHO SHOULD WALK DOWN THE ALLY?

IT'S SUPERWOMAN/MAN DISGUISED AS (VOLUNTEER'S NAME)


DC Power
IN
AC Power Adaptor
ANTENNA
DC Out
(VCR)
TV
AC IN
RF Cord
ANTENNA IN
(Back of TV)

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